

# Peonage Scheme

4-7-48  
Pittsburgh Courier

Minister Files Report  
Showing Wholesale  
Arrests of Negroes

Pittsburgh, Pa.

WASHINGTON — Sheriff Walter Clark of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., according to the Workers Defense League, is attempting to force Negroes to work for substandard wages on nearby farms by arresting everyone of them found idle on the streets, and fining them from \$25 to \$35 each, without trial.

Charging the sheriff with attempting to drive Negroes in that community into "legal slavery and peonage," the League has asked the Department of Justice to reopen the case against the Fort Lauderdale officer.

The League also charges that Sheriff Clark didn't care whether the Negroes had regular jobs or not, and that he arrested them and fined them, right then and there, without even bothering to take them to court.

## SECOND COMPLAINT

This is the second complaint the League has lodged against Sheriff Clark. After the first complaint, the civil liberties unit of the Department of Justice sought an indictment against the sheriff. A Federal Grand Jury in Miami heard forty-two witnesses Jan. 30-31 of this year, but refused to return an indictment, even though Justice Department prosecutors said it was among the cleverest examples of peonage and involuntary servitude they ever had come across.

4-7-48  
The League now asks the Justice Department to submit the case to another grand jury. At the same time, League officials charged that other communities in the South are following the same example as it claims Sheriff Clark practices in Fort Lauderdale. The League reported mass arrests of 200 Negroes in Florida.

# PEONAGE PLOT CHARGED TO WMC AGENCY

## War Workers Told To Return To Miss. Farm Work

JOLIET, Ill. — The long arm of Dixie's feudal-minded plantation owners stretched out into Illinois this week to force three Negro war workers to leave their factory jobs and return to work in Mississippi's cotton fields at \$1 a day.

Backed by Uncle Sam's War Manpower Commission, the Deep South law enforcement officers are evidently intent on extending their peonage system to the North, it was charged by the N.A.A.C.P.

The WMC's back-to-the-farm policy for Negroes came to light when the U.S. Employment Service ordered William Williams, 39, William Greene, 39, and Sam Adams, 45, to return to their former jobs at their former rate of pay. The men left Isola, Miss., a few months ago and took jobs in a local war plant.

A similar case was revealed in Indianapolis where a Negro war worker was told he must obey a demand from Yazoo City, Miss., that he return there for farm labor.

Peter Coates Jr., who had worked a Mississippi farm for five years under lease, went to Indianapolis when the lease expired and got a job in a war plant under a six week permit from the local U. S. Employment Service, according to Lowell Trice, president of the Indianapolis branch N.A.A.C.P.

After six weeks, the war plant referred Coates back to the employment office where he was told to report back to Mississippi authorities. Coates objected, but was advised to return to Mississippi as there would be no work for him in Indiana without the necessary papers and these were obtainable only through the county agent in the county where he had farmed.

"These workers," Trice declared, "through an un-American system, may be regimented in a 'back to the farm' movement."

"Appeals may be made," he added, "but they must be handled by the Farm Extension Service in the state from which the workers came."

**Groups Protest WMC Action**  
Protests against the orders to Williams, Greene and Adams will be sent to the Farm Extension Service and the WMC in Washington and to the Illinois Congressional delegation by two Joliet clergymen.

They are Rev. T. Moore King of the Second Baptist church also assistant secretary of the National Baptist Convention, Inc., and Rev. Charles G. Holson of Mount Olive Baptist church.

L. Virgil Williams, Negro regional examiner of the FEPC, said he would also make a full report on the case to the Chicago offices of the WMC and the N.A.A.C.P.

**WMC Action "Halts" Migration**  
"In the face of a war industries manpower shortage in Joliet, it is ridiculous to send these men back to farms where they are paid a pittance," declared Albert Krywonos, Will county subdistrict director of the CIO. "The CIO is going to fight this case to the bitter end."

Green has six children, Williams has two and Adams has three, including two in the armed forces.

The effect of the WMC action not only enables the extradition of Negro farm workers who have already moved to war industry centers to earn a better livelihood, but acts to prevent migration of other workers.



# Dixie Farmer Beats

DEFENDER

# U.S. Peonage Ruling

Chicago, Ill.

## Negro Charges Peonage Plot To W.M.C.

*Southern Journal  
Louisville, Ky.  
3-13-45*

### Pressure to Return To Farm Work Cited

Indianapolis, March 12 (AP)—Lowell Trice, president of the Indianapolis branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said today the War Manpower Commission has adopted a policy whereby Southern states may keep Negro farm workers "in a state of virtual peonage."

"These workers," Trice said, "through an un-American system, may be regimented in a 'back-to-the-farm' movement."

The policy was discovered, he said, in an investigation of the case of Peter Coates, Jr., who had worked a Mississippi farm for about five years under lease. When his lease expired Coates came to Indianapolis, where he obtained employment in a war plant under a six-week permit from the local U. S. Employment Service, Trice said. *3-13-45*

Trice added that the war plant, after six weeks, referred Coates back to the employment office, where he was informed that a demand had come from Yazoo City that he be sent back there for farm labor.

Coates did not wish to return to Mississippi but was advised by the employment service to return as there would be no work for him here without the necessary papers and these could only be obtained through the county agent in the county where he had farmed, Trice said.

INDIANAPOLIS—Dixie landlords lost their hold over a Negro war worker here when Peter Coates, an ex-Mississippi farmer, was granted the right to remain in Indiana war industry by the War Manpower Commission this week. The local N.A.A.C.P., through its president, Lowell Trice, announced that Coates was given a permanent clearance for work in the Indianapolis area. *4-24-45*

Coates left his farm near Yazoo City, Miss., last year because he and his family were slowly starving to death. After working for six weeks in a vital war industry here, he was ordered back to Mississippi by the WMC there.

"The N.A.A.C.P. contacted the Indianapolis office of the WMC," said Trice, "which operated by granting Coates a temporary permit and sent in his appeal form to Yazoo City with the notice that the N.A.A.C.P. intended to fight the case to Washington if necessary."

"This is an important victory for civil rights but the situation out of which it grew has not been corrected," warned Trice. "The job stabilization program of the WMC still permits the cotton and tobacco planters of the southern states literally to hold poor Negro or white farm workers in peonage."

# White Man Comes To Rescue Of Prisoner

MEMPHIS, TENN. —(SNS)—

A strange story was told in Memphis last week. It was the account of the condition of a Negro living in the plantation area.

Last week a Memphis white man...an outstanding business leader, was reading his daily newspaper. He read the story of what happened to a local Negro accused of finding a \$1000 bill. The bill was later found by a white passerby. It was located after the man, Grady, had been allegedly brutally beaten by local police. 12-18-45

The white man read the editorials and the news stories carried in the local papers, and became violently indignant. He was so indignant until he went to the Memphis Police Department, and requested the privilege of going through the cells to observe Negro prisoners and their treatment.

Enroute he passed out cigarettes to colored prisoners. Suddenly he observed one inmate. He asked him what he was doing in jail. The man replied he was in jail because he had been found drunk.

The white Memphis man was sympathetic with this Negro prisoner and consented to pay his fine. However, he inquired as to the reason the inmate had not called his "white boss" and arranged for the payment of the fine. The Negro explained that he had not been permitted to make a long distance call over the local police station telephone.

The arrested man is John Kittrelle, 40, of Horn Lake, Mississippi. For the past six years he has worked as a sharecropper on a plantation near Horn Lake. Kittrelle said he has worked on the plantation of Doctor Krack of Horn Lake. He said that throughout the time he worked on the plantation he received only \$50 or \$60 at the end of each year. He said that this year his family, including his wife and five children, were bare-footed and hungry... that he had heard that the owner of the plantation on which he lived was planning to sell the place... and that he did not want to live on a place owned by the white man who purchased the place, he decided to come to Memphis to see what he could do about moving his family away from the plantation. 12-18-45

When he reached Memphis he met some people. They gave him a drink. He got drunk... and passed out. He woke up in the jail house.

It was then that the local white

humanitarian met the sharecropper.

Then the white man heard another strange angle. He called the white employer of the jailed Negro. The Mississippi white man, Doctor Krack, stated that he had sold his plantation a few days before to another white man, and in view of the fact that the Negro, Kittrelle, still owed him money on the basis of his obligations to him as previously committed, the Negro and his family had been "sold" along with the property!"

This further infuriated the Memphis white leader. He called for the Memphis World reporter to come and take the story, after he was informed that the local white dailies considered the story "too hot." When asked what he intended to do with Kittrelle, who was sitting in his office during the interview, the Memphian said, "I intend to take this Negro in my car and go down and see his boss in Mississippi... after an adjustment is made there, I intend to bring him and his family back here and let him work for me." 12-18-45

The white man involved is Mr. James Bates, president of the American Appliance Company, 2130 Madison Avenue.



# *The Chicago Defender* Farmers' Union To Meet

MEMPHIS, Tenn.—The 12th annual convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers' union will meet in St. Louis, Mo., on Dec. 11, 12, 13. Approximately 150 Negro and white delegates representing 50,000 farm laborers in seven Southern states will attend the sessions at the St. Peter's Episcopal church.

jobs for under-employed farm labor cooperative stores and legal rights. Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, the president of the National Council of Negro women was scheduled to speak on the subject of "Inter-racial Cooperation."

The convention closed Thursday with election of officers for 1946.

The officers elected for the year 1946 are as follows: H. L. Mitchell, Memphis President; F. R. Betton, St. Louis, Vice President; Dorothy Dowe, Memphis, Secretary. Members of the National Executive Council are: A. E. Cox, Cruger, Miss; J. F. Hynds, Spruce Pine, Ala.; J. E. Clayton, Chicago, Ill.; W. A. Johnson, Wardell, Mo.; George Stith Howell, Ark.; John Gammill, Clearview, Okla.; Carrie Dilworth, Gould Ark.; Mae Pearl Kelly, Memphis.

## Southern Tenant Farmers

*The Memphis World*

## Union Meets In St. Louis

*Memphis Tennessee*

The 12th annual convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union opened in St. Louis, Mo., on Tuesday morning, December 11, H. L. Mitchell, President of the Union announced.

The sessions are opened to the public and is being held in the auditorium of St. Peter's Episcopal Church on Spring Avenue. Approximately 150 delegates from Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico arrived in St. Louis on trucks, jalopies, buses and trains. 12-18-45

On the opening day, Rt. Rev. William Scarlett, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Missouri, addressed the convention. Rev. Clifford Stanley, Pastor of St. Peter's Church, conducted the devotional services. A representative Mayor, A. P. Kaufman delivered the welcome address. In the afternoon, Mr. E. P. Theiss, representative of the American Federation of Labor and Mr. Gardner Jackson, representative of the National Farmers Union, were scheduled to address the convention.

Committees were elected in the afternoon and the convention discussed parts of the report of the Executive Council recommending the establishment of a Farm Labor Lobby in Washington, and a proposal for an annual wage of \$625 a year or \$5 a day for farm labor engaged in the production of cotton. 12-18-45

The second day of the convention was opened with a discussion on farm and home ownership. Dr. Desmond W. Bittinger, Gospel Messenger, Church of the Brethren, from Elgin, Ill., was one of the discussion leaders. Mr. August Schools, national representative of the Congress of Industrial Organizations Washington, and Mr. Patrick E. German, International Secretary, Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of M. A. of Chicago, will address the convention. The afternoon session will be devoted to discussion of seasonal

## Southern Tenant Farmers' Union

*TENN.*

## Holds Meeting

12-25-45

The 12th. annual convention of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union meeting in St. Louis, Mo., December 11, 12, and 13th., adopted a program calling for an annual wage of not less than \$625 per year, or \$5 per day for all types of farm labor. The convention also voted to change the name of the organization to National Farm Labor Union.

Among the highlights of the convention which was attended by 3 delegates, was a resolution which was telegraph to President Truman urging that legislation be enacted which will provide for the seizure and distribution of large plantations in the same manner that General McArthur had ordered in Japan to abolish farm tenancy and absentee ownership of land. 12-25-45

The convention voted to establish a farm labor lobby in Washington and to raise funds to work for a five point legislative program which includes; measures to re-settle families displaced by the mechanical cotton picker on small farms; the extension of old age pension to all farm people over 60 years of age; health, education, and rural housing programs; the extension of wage and hour, and national labor relations protection to farm labor. Cooperation with other agencies in securing the adoption of Fair Employment Practices Act, repeal of the poll tax, and anti-lynching legislation was pledged.

Speakers addressing the convention included: E. P. Theiss, Washington, American Federation of Labor; August Scholle, Detroit, Congress of Industrial Organizations; and Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, President, National Council of Negro women.

12-25-45

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# Sharecroppers' Wages

**New Republic**  
SIR: In your editorial columns of September 17, you protested wisely against the proposed ceilings on wages of cotton-pickers in the South, piece-rate ceilings equivalent usually to wages of less than \$2 a day. However, one of your statements may be misleading to your readers—your reference to the fact that “the poor sharecropper . . . is enjoying unprecedented war prosperity.” It is true that the price of cotton is high, but the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union reports that 60 percent of the farm families in Arkansas received less than \$400 cash for their work in 1944. This is certainly higher than average sharecropper earnings in prewar years: a study conducted by leading economists under the auspices of the University of North Carolina found “the average gross income per farm family engaged in cotton growing [in 1933] \$216.” But is even \$400 a year “prosperity”? The sharecroppers themselves do not think so; the Southern Tenant Farmers’ Union is conducting a campaign for a guaranteed annual wage of \$625.

Whether he is prosperous or not, the sharecropper does not gain from the imposition of low wage ceilings on cotton-picking because so many sharecroppers pick cotton for wages in order to supplement earnings from their own holdings. Furthermore, sharecroppers in the main rely on the members of their families to pick the crops on their own acres, as they seldom have capital to hire labor. **N.Y., N.Y.**

The Economic Stabilization Act was surely not designed to force even lower the wages of the most underpaid labor in the entire nation, and it is absurd to initiate such action this year, as demobilization and lay-offs are already beginning to alleviate the labor shortage. **10-29-45**

ALFRED BAKER LEWIS, Secretary-Treasurer,  
National Sharecroppers’ Fund

New York City

General